

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in Atlanta, Georgia
March 16, 2012

The President. Hello, Atlanta! Hello, Georgia! Oh, it is good to be in Atlanta, Georgia. Thank you. Thank you.

Audience member. I love you!

The President. I love you back. I do. [*Laughter*]

So let me first of all acknowledge a few people who are here. The outstanding young mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, Kasim Reed is in the house. One of the finest men I know, somebody upon whose shoulders I stand, the great Congressman John Lewis is in the house; other outstanding members of the congressional delegation here in Georgia: Sanford Bishop, David Scott, Hank Johnson.

Somebody who—I was just reminiscing. When I first started to run for office, a lot of people weren't sure whether a guy named Barack Obama could win. And so we went down to the Selma commemoration—Edmund Pettus Bridge—and we're in church. And a lot of folks at that point are still wondering whether this is a good idea, that this young guy is running for President. And this man gets up onstage, and he explains how people call him a little crazy, but "there is good crazy, and there's bad crazy." He tells me now that he came up with the idea when his doctor explained to him there was good cholesterol and bad cholesterol. [*Laughter*] But he decided that supporting Barack Obama was a "good kind of crazy," he said. We have been dear friends ever since. The Reverend Dr. Joseph Lowery is in the house.

And finally, let me just say about—something about the man who introduced us, Tyler Perry, hosting us all at his incredible facility. He and I were talking, and there's something about America where somebody from my background can do what I'm doing and somebody from Tyler's background can do what he's doing. And as tough as things get sometimes and as frustrated and cynical people can get about politics, when you look at a Tyler Perry and all that he's achieved and the humility and graciousness with which he's achieved it, you can't help but be proud of him and to be proud of our country. So give it up for Mr. Tyler Perry.

Now, I'm here today not only because I need your help. I'm here because the country needs your help. There was a lot of reasons why so many of you decided to get involved and then just work your hearts out in the campaign in 2008. It was not because you thought it would be easy. The odds of me becoming President were long. You didn't need a poll to know it was going to be tough. You didn't join the campaign because of me. You joined it because of your commitment to each other and the vision that we share about America.

It wasn't a vision where just a few people do well and everybody else is on their own and the most powerful are able to make their own rules. It wasn't a cramped vision or a selfish vision of America. It wasn't a limited vision about our future. It was a vision of America where everybody who works hard has a chance to get ahead, not just those who are born into it, but a Tyler Perry or a Barack Obama or a child in Georgia or a child in a barrio in Texas or a poor child in some rural community in the Midwest. It didn't matter. They would have a chance if they were willing to work hard.

That's the vision we shared. That's the change we believed in. We knew it wouldn't come easy. We knew it wouldn't come quickly. But we believed. And in just 3 years, because of what you did in 2008, we've begun to see what change looks like.

Change is the first bill I signed into law—a law that says women deserve an equal day's pay for an equal day's work—because I don't want my daughters treated any differently than your sons. I want them to have the same opportunities. That's what change is.

Change is the decision we made to rescue the American auto industry at a time when it was on the verge of collapse and some folks were saying let Detroit go bankrupt. We had 1 million jobs on the line, and I wasn't going to let them go. Today, GM is back on top, the number-one automaker in the world, just reported the highest profits in a hundred-year history. With more than 200,000 new jobs added, the United States auto industry is back. That's what change is. That's what you did.

Change is the decision we made to stop waiting for Congress to do something about energy. We've been listening to politicians for three decades, four decades, saying they were going to do something about energy. We went ahead and did it: raised fuel efficiency standards on cars. By the next decade, we'll be driving American-made cars getting 55 miles a gallon. That will save the average family \$8,000 at the pump. That's what change is. And it happened because of you.

Change is us deciding, you know what, why are we giving \$60 billion to the banks to manage the student loan program; let's give it directly to the students, so that millions of more young people are either getting higher Pell grants or finally eligible, being able to invest in things like early education and community colleges and HBCUs.

Change is attacking the cycle of poverty not by just pouring money into a broken system, but by building on what works. Promise Neighborhoods—the idea of pulling all our resources together to make sure that everybody has a chance, rebuilding our public services, public housing, making sure that our education system is working, making sure that we've got partnerships with local leaders like Kasim Reed. All across the country, rebuilding cities, one block, one neighborhood at a time. That's what change is.

Change is, yes, health care reform. You want to call it Obamacare, that's okay, because I do care. That's why we passed it. *[Applause]* That is why we passed it, because I care about folks who were going bankrupt because they were getting sick. And I care about children who have preexisting conditions and their families couldn't get them any kind of insurance. And so now we've got reforms that will ensure that in this great country of ours you won't have to mortgage your house just because you get sick.

Right now 2.5 million young people already have health insurance who didn't have it before because of this law. It let them stay on their parents' policies. Insurance companies can't just deny you coverage or drop your coverage at a time when you need it most. Seniors are seeing more help when it comes to their prescription drugs and preventive care. That's what change is.

Change is the fact that for the first time in history, you don't have to hide who you love in order to serve the country you love. We ended "don't ask, don't tell."

Change is keeping the promise I made in 2008: For the first time in 9 years, there are no Americans fighting in Iraq. We decided to refocus on the folks who actually attacked us on

9/11. And thanks to the brave men and women in uniform, Al Qaida is weaker than it's ever been and Usama bin Laden is not walking this face—the face of this Earth.

None of this has been easy. And we still have a lot of work to do, because there are a lot of folks who are still hurting out there, a lot of folks still pounding the pavement looking for work, a lot of people whose homes—values have dropped, a lot of people who are still struggling to make the rent. There are still too many families who can barely pay their bills, too many young people still living in poverty.

I was reading a statistic the other day: Fewer than half of African Americans believe we'll reach the dream Dr. King left for us. So we've still got so much work to do.

And I know when we look at what is, it can be heartbreaking and frustrating. But I ran for President—and you joined this cause—because we don't settle just for what is, we strive for what might be. We want to help more Americans reach that dream. I ran for President to give every child a chance, whether he's born in Atlanta or comes from a rural town in the Delta. I ran for President not just to get us back to where we were, but to take us forward to where we need to be.

And I'm telling you, Atlanta, we are going to get there. Step by step, we are going to get there. Already over the past 2 years, our businesses have added almost 4 million new jobs. Manufacturers are creating jobs for the first time since the 1990s. The recovery is accelerating. Our economy is getting stronger. We're moving on the right track. What we can't do is go back to the same policies that got us into this mess in the first place.

Of course, that's exactly what the other folks want to do, the folks who are running for President. And they make no secret about it. They want to roll back the laws that we put in place so that now Wall Street can play by its own rules again. They want to go back to the day when insurance companies could deny you coverage or jack up your premiums any time they wanted without reason. They want to spend trillions more on tax breaks for the very wealthiest of individuals, even if it means adding to the deficit, even if it means gutting things like education or our investment in clean energy or making sure Medicare is stable.

Their philosophy is simple: Everybody is just left to fend for themselves, if those in power could make their own rules, and somehow it's all going to trickle down to you. And they're wrong. They're wrong. They were wrong when they tried it, and they're wrong now.

In the United States of America, we are always greater together than we are on our own. We're always better off when we keep that basic American promise that if you work hard, you can do well enough to raise a family and own a home and send your kids to college and put a little away for retirement. And that's the choice in this election.

We've got different visions being presented. This is not just another political debate, this is the defining issue of our time. What are we going to do to make sure that middle class families are secure and that we continue to build ladders for people who are trying to get into the middle class? We don't need an economy that's built on outsourcing and bad debt and phony financial profits. We need an economy that's built to last, an economy that's built on American manufacturing, American energy, and giving skills to American workers, and holding up those values that we cherish: hard work, fair play, shared responsibility.

When we think about the next generation of manufacturing, I don't want it taking root in Asia, I want it taking root in Atlanta. I don't want this Nation just to be known for buying and consuming things from other countries. I want to build and sell to other countries products

made in the United States of America. I want to stop rewarding businesses that are shipping jobs overseas. I want to reward companies, like this one, that are creating jobs right here in the United States of America.

I want to make sure that our schools are the envy of the world. And that means investing in the men and women who stand in front of the classroom. A good teacher increases the income of a classroom by over \$2,500. A great teacher can help a child move beyond their immediate circumstances and reach out for their dreams. I don't want Washington to defend the status quo, but I don't want them to be just bashing teachers. I want to give schools the resources they need to keep good teachers on the job and reward the best teachers and grant schools flexibility to teach with creativity and passion, stop teaching to the test, replace teachers that aren't helping kids learn. I want us to create in this country the kind of passion and reverence for education that's not just, by the way, a job of government, but a job of each of us: as parents, as community leaders.

And when kids do graduate, I want them to be able to afford to go to college. We've got more tuition debt than credit card debt today. And by the way, right now interest rates are scheduled to go up on student loans in July if Congress does not act, so you guys need to get on Congress about that.

And I've said to colleges and universities, you've got to stop tuition from just going up and up and up and up. Higher education cannot be a luxury; it is an economic imperative that every family should be able to afford.

I want an economy that's supporting the scientists and researchers that will make sure we discover the next breakthrough in biotechnology, in clean energy. We have subsidized oil companies for 100 years, given them \$4 billion worth of tax breaks when they are making near-record profits. It is time to stop giving tax giveaways to an industry that's never been more profitable and start investing in clean energy that can create jobs here in the United States in solar power and wind power and biofuels.

We need to give our businesses the best infrastructure in the world: newer roads and airports and faster railroads and Internet access. You take half the money that we've been spending on the wars in Iraq, as we phase down the war in Afghanistan—let's pay down—use half of it to pay down our debt. Let's use the other half to do some nation-building here at home. Let's put people to work rebuilding schools, rebuilding our bridges, rebuilding our ports.

And to pay for this, we've got to have a tax system that is fair. I was with Warren Buffett a couple days ago. He says, "Thanks for naming a rule after me." [*Laughter*] We—it's a very simple principle, the Buffett rule. It says if you make more than a million dollars a year, you should not pay a lower tax rate than your secretary. We've said if you make less than \$250,000 a year, which is 98 percent of Americans, your taxes shouldn't go up. But folks like me, we can afford to do a little more. Tyler can afford to do a little more. Tyler? [*Laughter*] He knows he—[*laughter*]*—he knows that.*

When we say that, this is not class warfare, this is not envy. This is just basic math. Because if Tyler or I or others get tax breaks we don't need, weren't asking for, that the country can't afford, then one of two things are going to happen. Either the deficit goes up—all these other folks they say they want to do something about the deficit; every single one of their plans actually increases the deficit. Or alternatively, they've got to make up for it by taking it away from somebody who really needs it: the student who suddenly sees their interest on their loans

going up, the senior who suddenly has to pay more for Medicare, the veteran who's not getting help after having protected us, the family that's trying to get by. It's not right. It's not who we are.

I hear a lot of politicians talk about values during election year. You know what, I'm happy to have a values debate. I'm happy to have a debate about values. I think about the values my mother and my grandparents taught me. Hard work, that's a value. Looking out for one another, that's a value. I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper, that is a value. Each of us is only here because somebody somewhere was looking out for us. It started in the family, but it wasn't just the immediate family. There was somebody in church. There was somebody in the neighborhood. There was the coach of the Little League. There was somebody who made an investment in our country's future.

Our story has never been about what we can do alone. It's what we do together. We don't win the race for new jobs and middle class security and new businesses with the same old you-are-on-your-own economics. I am telling you, it does not work. It did not work in the decade before the Great Depression. It did not work in the decade before I took office. It won't work now.

This is about who we are as a country, the opportunities we've always, always passed on to future generations. When I think about Michelle and me and where we come from—[applause]—I know you all love Michelle, I know. [Applause] I know. I love her too. [Laughter] But I think about—sometimes we'll be in the White House, and we think about my mother-in-law who lives upstairs and was a secretary. Michelle's dad had multiple sclerosis and still went to work every day, blue-collar job; my mom raising me, a single mom. I think about what they did for us and the sacrifices they made.

And so then I think, well, the sacrifices that I have to make, given all the blessings that I've received, they can't just extend to Malia and Sasha. I've got to be thinking about somebody else's kids. I've got to be making sure that somebody else gets a student loan who's maybe a single mom going back to school just like my mom, who was able to get a student loan so—to get an education. I'm thinking, we've got to make sure that jobs are out there for folks who are willing to work and overcoming barriers. And I'm willing to make some sacrifices for that. And that makes my life better. Right?

And most of you understand that. You understand if you invest in a teacher and then she teaches somebody who is the next Steve Jobs or invents some cure for a major disease, that makes us all better. If we invest in Internet services for rural Georgians, there is a little store out there that, suddenly, business starts booming because they now have a worldwide market through the Internet, and that creates economic opportunity for everybody.

That idea is not a Democratic idea, it is not a Republican idea. That is an American idea. Abraham Lincoln understood it. The first Republican President during a war invested in the transcontinental railroad, the National Academy of Sciences, land-grant colleges.

Dwight Eisenhower, Republican, built the Interstate Highway System. Teddy Roosevelt, Republican, called for a progressive income tax. This is not just a Democratic idea. This is an American idea, that we invest in our future and that we are stronger together than we are on our own.

And you know, sometimes that spirit may seem to have vanished in Washington. Sometimes it may seem like our politics is just a bad reality show—[laughter]—people arguing

and fussing and trying to score points and—[*laughter*]. But you know, out in the country, when I go to town halls, when I go to a VFW hall, that spirit it still there.

People still understand, this country that gave us so much, we want to pass that on to the next generation. They understand that it's not just about us, it's about what we can do for each other. It's not just about the next election, it's about the next generation. You talk to our men and women in uniform, they understand it. You talk to folks in our places of worship, they recognize it. And all of you recognize it. And that's what we tapped into in 2008—that spirit, that spirit.

So let me just say this: I'm a little grayer now. [*Laughter*] I'm a little—got some bumps and bruises. I know that over the last 3 years there have been times where we've suffered setbacks and change hasn't come as fast as we would have liked. And people still got the old "Hope" posters; it's, like, fading a little bit. [*Laughter*] And I know that there are times where you might start feeling cynical about what's possible.

But I just want to remind you of what I said back in 2008. I said change is hard. I said this may not happen in 1 year, it may not happen in one term, it may not happen with one President. But if we stick with it, if we're determined, if we understand the rightness of our cause, if we continue to think not in terms of just what's good for me, but what's good for us, we will get there.

And I also told you—I told you I'm not a perfect man, and I won't be a perfect President. But I said I'd always tell you what I thought, I would always tell you where I stood, and I would wake up every single day thinking about you and working as hard as I know how to make your lives a little bit better.

And I have kept that promise. I have kept that promise these last 3 years. And so if you're willing to get back to organizing, if you're willing to get on the phone and e-mail and tweet and knock on doors and do what needs to be done, if you feel the same passion and same energy and same determination as I do—and I feel it more now than I have ever felt it in my life—then I promise you we will finish what we started. Two thousand and eight was a beginning. We're still on that journey. We've got 5 more years of work before us.

I promise you change will come. The change you believe in will come. And we will remind the world once again just why it is the United States of America is the greatest country on Earth.

God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:05 p.m. at the Tyler Perry Studios. In his remarks, he referred to entertainer Tyler Perry; Warren E. Buffett, chairman and chief executive officer, Berkshire Hathaway Inc.; and his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

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